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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: THE MAN IN HIS "LIFE" AND "LETTERS."*

THE difficulties of biography are proverbial; but to write of Stevenson, many-sided, versatile, elusive—a man of Protean charm, so dearly loved and praised withal—was a formidable task. His personality casts a spell (even those who know him only through his books are bewitched), and the superior critics, "who sit up aloft," are perhaps not unjustified in their deprecation of his lovers' ardor. To be allied by blood and by intimate association with this man who was loved best by those who knew him best, while it fitted Mr. Balfour for the work, increased the difficulties of dispassionate portrayal. The book is frank, yet written with proper restraint; full of detail, satisfying interest but shutting out curiosity. Mr. Balfour has kept himself out of sight; he makes no attempt to criticise Stevenson's work, or to forecast its place in literature; he tells the story of his kinsman's life simply, but with dignity, in a pleasant, lucid style admirably suited to narrative. He shows what manner of life that was; you can see for yourself the man who lived it.

Sir Walter Scott enjoyed the life of a man of letters, which so well became him; but, like Carlyle, Stevenson's ambition was to do, not to talk—to be the builder in the breakers, not the singer by the fire. Love of action, delight in man's

* "Life of Robert Louis Stevenson." By Graham Balfour. Two volumes. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

"The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson." Edited by Sidney Colvin. Two volumes. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

ceaseless conflict with nature's forces and in his battle with the sea—with energy, vivacity, and the power to command men—were in the Stevenson blood.

Robert Stevenson, engineer and builder of lighthouses in the Northern Seas, died before his grandson, Robert Louis, was born. But his was the vivid personality that lives in the memory and speech of those who knew him; and the old gentleman, who was "much of a martinet, with his powerful voice and sanguine countenance," his eccentric speech and autocratic rule, seems to have been very present to the childhood of his grandson, who writes of him with zest. "With a perpetual fine scent and quest for what seems romantic to a boy," he pursued the hardships of his work—tossing in a small boat on uncharted seas, landing on barren coasts, the lonely reconnoissance among smugglers and wreckers, the battle with the unrelenting sea—"all the vicissitudes of an outdoor life delighted him and thrilled him." "The joy of my grandfather in this career was strong as the love of women." "In the service he was king to his finger tips. All should go his way, from the principal light-keeper's coat to the assistant's fender, from the gravel in the garden walks, to the bad smell in the kitchen, or the oil-spots on the storeroom floor. It might be thought there was nothing more calculated to awake men's resentment, and yet his rule was not more thorough than it was beneficent. . . . No servant of the Northern Lights came to Edinburgh but he was entertained at Baxter's Place to breakfast. There at his own table he sat down delightedly with his broad-spoken, homespun officers. His whole relation to the service was patriarchal, and I believe that I may say that throughout its ranks he was adored."

Stevenson says, "I am one of the few people in the world who do not forget their own lives;" so the memories and happenings of his early days were most potent influences in his later development. His solitary childhood, with the long days in bed, and the months indoors, was brightened and companioned by stories of his father's boyhood. The lonely child must have spent many happy days imagining

himself in his grandfather's house, a delightful, big, rambling place with surprising attics and cellars, where troops of boys played at battles and sieges with perpetual joy (even though "tutors shed a gloom for an hour or so in the evening"); where seafaring men came and went, and any morning there might be a reformed buccaneer to breakfast. But the builder of lighthouses, long since sailed on his last voyage, was most real to the childish dreamer, who in manhood had in him the same energy and love of honest work, "the same interest in the whole page of experience," the delight in adventure, the same love of the sea. He writes of him, not from the detached point of view of the grandson, but with a sense of peculiar kinship; and there are few things finer than his account of the last drama in that romantic life. "He began to ail early in that year, and chafed for the period of the annual voyage, which was his medicine and delight. In vain his sons dissuaded him from the adventure. The day approached, the obstinate old gentleman was found in his room furtively packing a portmanteau, and the truth had to be told him ere he would desist—that he was stricken with a malignant malady, and that before the yacht should have completed her circuit of the lights must have himself started on a more distant cruise. My father has more than once told me of the scene with emotion. The old man was intrepid; he had faced death before with a firm countenance; and I do not suppose he was much dashed at the nearness of our common destiny. But there was something else that would cut him to the quick—the loss of the cruise, the end of all his cruising; the knowledge that he had looked his last on Sumburgh and the wild crags of Skye and that Sound of Mull with the praise of which his letters were so often occupied; that he was never again to hear the surf break in Clashcarnock; never again see lighthouse after lighthouse (all younger than himself, and the more part of his own device) open in the hour of dusk their flowers of fire, or the topaz and the ruby interchange on the summit of the Bell Rock. To a life of so much interest and essential beauty, here came a long farewell."

Stevenson was also "the grandson of the manse," and writes of the rather awesome minister with a whimsical charm and aloofness. "Try as I please, I cannot join myself on with the reverend doctor; and all the while no doubt he moves in my blood and whispers words to me, and sits efficient in the very knot and center of my being."

"Did you ever hear me preach?" Coleridge, mindful of his late appearance in a pulpit, asked Charles Lamb. "I never heard you do anything else," was the candid answer. The friends of Stevenson were wont to remind him, when he indulged at their expense what he called his "love of preaching," that he was not only the grandson of the reverend doctor, but was also the lineal descendant of that more formidable preacher of whom Burns wrote:

Smith opens out his cauld harangues
On practice and on morals.

This blending of the romantic and the scientific with "intense ethical preoccupations" was a happy inheritance—the future writer was "wise in his choice of ancestors"—it explains, in a measure, one of the rarest qualities of his genius. One is carried breathless through adventures, with every reality of peril, with heat and cold and thirst and weariness; but when the book is laid aside, what one remembers is, not so much the hairbreadth escapes, but (as in real experience) what the people engaged have shown themselves to be, their weakness, their hidden motives, their unguessed strength. In one of his early letters Stevenson defends the partisan historian: "It is not so much what people did that I care for, but why they thought they did it." As a very little boy drawing pictures, "Mamma," said the future creator of Henry Durrisdere, "Mamma, I have drawn a man; shall I draw his soul now?"

Except the accounts of DeQuincey's childhood, I know of none so delightful as those Stevenson has left of his. Both are touched with magic. The record, sorrowful enough, stirs us, now with pity for the suffering child, now with envy of the spirit and imagination that burned so bright in those dark days of pain. His mother was an invalid, too, and could not

enter into his life so actively as she wished; so it is of his father and of his nurse that we hear most. Alison Cunningham came into the household when he was eighteen months old, and stayed "long after he passed out of women's care," refusing an offer of marriage that she might not be separated from her laddie. A delicate child with a consumptive tendency, who often never set foot over the threshold in those long, fierce Edinburgh winters, who lay for weeks in bed, who coughed through the weary nights, he was still a veritable Prince of Illusion, and seems to have lived in a wonder world, possible only to an imaginative child. The ordinary diversions of childish illness he invested with peculiar charm—his sick bed was the Land of Counterpane, over whose hills and dales his soldiers marched and galloped. If they fought a battle, 'twas the ditch of Waterloo or the charge at Bala-klava. What joy and romance and various delight he found in coloring pictures! No one who has read his "Penny Plain and Two-pence Colored" can forget "Skelt," whose name all Stevenson's life was his whimsical synonym for the bliss of impossible romance. Skelt was a benefactor whose toy theaters could be bought for one or two pence, but this boy preferred the penny plain, for the landscapes were to be colored and the actors sumptuously clothed in scarlet. "With Crimson Lake (hark to the sound of it: Crimson Lake!—the horns of elfland are not richer to the ear), with Crimson Lake and Prussian Blue a certain purple was to be compounded which for cloaks Titian himself could not equal." As a very little boy he chanted himself to sleep with that touching medley of half-fledged dreams and drowsy memories of the long day so enchanting on the lips of a beloved child. He called them "songstries." Sometimes fear clutched him when the wind rode furiously up and down the dark streets, and his father beguiled his fright, inventing tales of travelers and soldiers, of taverns and stages and coast-guardsmen. Often he coughed all night, and the faithful Alison would carry him to the window to see those windows where lights burned, "where also we told each other there might be sick little boys and their nurses waiting, like us, for the morning."

His father and mother were genuinely religious people, so neither Bible nor Shorter Catechism was lacking. But Alison introduced him to her favorite theologians, read to him from the austere page of the Covenanters, or recited the Cameronian's Dream. After the most straitest sect she lived a Presbyterian, and abhorred cards and play acting as wiles of the devil. "Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson played whist, decorous family whist, and Louis could remember praying fervently with his nurse that it might not be visited on them to their perdition." Novels were no less forbidden, but they read the tales in a Family Paper; sometimes Alison became alarmed and "would express a well-grounded fear that the current fiction was going to turn out a regular novel, and the Family Paper, with my pious approval, would be dropped. Yet neither she nor I were wholly stoical, and when Saturday came round we would study the windows of the stationers and try to fish out of subsequent woodcuts and their legends the further adventures of our favorites." It is a charming, quaint picture: that eager pair gazing in at the shop window. One fancies them oblivious of the passers-by, explaining the pictures to each other, the boy talking most, his brilliant, childish imagination outstripping hers, with bright eyes and eager gesture urging her grown-up thoughts into his flying pace. "Cummie" was only a servant, and had a Scotch conscience; but she was no mean companion, for she had spirit and sympathy and vivacity, and as they turned reluctantly away one realizes how their wistful regret for the undeciphered joys of the story was upborne by the exalted sense of how much they were giving up for conscience' sake.

His respect and affection for Alison Cunningham endured all his life, and expressed itself in many ways. Some of his most charming letters were to her. This was written when he was twenty-one, "a time," says his biographer, "when most young men are not tender to such memories:" "Do not suppose that I shall ever forget those long, bitter nights, when I coughed and coughed and was so unhappy, and you were so patient and loving with a poor, sick child. Indeed,

Cummie, I wish I might become a man worth talking of, if it were only that you should not have thrown away your pains. Happily, it is not the result of our acts that makes them brave and noble, but the acts themselves and the unselfish love that moved us to do them. 'Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these.' My dear old nurse—and you know there is nothing a man can say nearer his heart except his mother or his wife—my dear old nurse, God will make good to you all the good that you have done, and mercifully forgive you all the evil. And next time when the spring comes round, and everything is beginning once again, if you should happen to think that you might have had a child of your own, and that it was hard you should have spent so many years taking care of some one else's prodigal, just you think this: You have been for a great deal in my life; you have made much that there is in me just as surely as if you had conceived me; and there are sons who are more ungrateful to their own mothers than I am to you. For I am not ungrateful, my dear Cummie, and it is with a very sincere emotion that I write myself your little boy, Louis."

At school Stevenson was idle and erratic. "I think," says his mother, "his teachers loved better to talk with him than to teach him." Thomas Stevenson had a rooted dislike for all the processes of education, so called ("positively tutorial" was one of his delightfully original expressions of contempt), and he consistently encouraged his son to neglect his tasks at school. It was an education to live with such a father, keen, vigorous, original, acquisitive, insatiable of knowledge, a man impatient of convention, who expressed himself with singular vigor and propriety. "His talk was a perpetual delight to all who knew him—affections and emotions found the most eloquent expression both in words and gestures. Love, anger, and indignation shone through him and broke forth in imagery like what we read of in Southern races." There was singular sympathy and frankness between father and son, not seriously disturbed through his boyhood and early youth; even when the father found he must give up his cherished dream of seeing his son the great

engineer of the family. Engineering abandoned, Pegasus was harnessed to the plow, and Stevenson studied law, was admitted to the bar, and, indued in wig and gown, masqueraded up and down the Court of Sessions waiting (not very seriously) for clients. Also in the office of certain writers to the Signet he occupied himself with copying, without undue industry, as six pounds is recorded "as about the amount of your writing during the period you have been in the office"—a year. An entry in a diary of this time is illuminating: "At work all day at court—work being periphrasis for sitting still, taking three luncheons and running two errands."

All this time Stevenson was absorbed in his own great affair of learning to write, but his apparent invincible idleness must have sorely tried his busy father. The years of youth are rarely happy but in retrospect, and Stevenson suffered acutely from all the "maladies incident to being twenty years old." For society, in the ordinary sense, he cared nothing; he had youth's uncompromising contempt for its shams and conventions; the inequalities of life filled him with "trumpeting anger;" he dressed, like Charles Lamb at the play, "to see, not to be seen." What would society with such a one? He had not yet found his friends, and, though living in comfort, he was dependent on a father naturally grown somewhat impatient of his desultory habits. It is far easier to look back and see the unmistakable signs of genius in the vagaries of youthful idleness than it is to recognize them at the time, and life just then must have been hard for both father and son.

The early letters of Stevenson have little interest, but now and then through the self-consciousness and reticence there is a gleam of charming frankness or the inspiration of a sudden happy phrase; as, after a wakeful night, "When day came at last, the dawn seemed to fall on me like a sleeping draught." These letters have the disadvantage of being written to his father and mother. There comes a time, in adolescence, when the unemotional affection of parents and inherited friends no longer suffices, when confidences cease, and the youth, if he be of tender conscience, accuses himself in secret of no longer loving his parents. They know all

about him, they have always known all about him; in turn he thinks he knows them by heart, and this mutual satisfied ignorance seals up knowledge. For the time their eyes are holden that they might not see; and while outwardly life goes on the same, the son sits at his father's hearth a stranger. All the while he is making discoveries, of life and love and death—most of all about himself. He is new to himself; he wants the sympathy and comprehension of some other to whom he is new; of some one who takes him seriously, who will not be amused or superior, who will not quench his enthusiasm with maturity's disgusting shibboleth, "Some day you will outgrow all this." He wants for friend either another youth or a woman. Stevenson, to whom in the matter of friends the gods gave with both hands, had both; and in his letters to Sidney Colvin and Mrs. Sitwell the tongue of his spirit is loosened, and his letters are full of variety and charm, crowded with impressions and pictures, in every mood—serious, bright, melancholy, stirred now and then by an enchanting breath of gayety—but all unstudied, and written with captivating frankness and friendliness. We see the craftsman learning to use his tools, and the alternating hope and despair of his struggles with them. "I cannot make things fall into sentences, they only sprawl over the paper in bald orphan clauses;" and again, "I must say I am a very bad workman, *mais j'ai du courage*; I am indefatigable at re-writing and lettering, and surely that humble quality should get me on a little." With the strongest faith that the root of the matter was in him, he cherished no illusions as to the quality of the work he was doing, but—"Never mind; ten years hence, if I live, I shall have learned, so help me God; but it's a long look forward." "Ah! when shall I find the story of my dreams that shall never halt nor wander nor step aside, but go ever before its face, and ever swifter and louder, until the pit receives it roaring?"

Every year his life was broadening with travel, new interest, new friends; he had the joy of doing the work he loved, for "occupation's the thing; so that a man should have his life in his own pocket;" but the time of his early manhood

was unhappy in the alienation from his father. A witty mother once pointed out that to fathers St. Paul's chief injunction is, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath;" and therein that astute judge of human nature puts his finger unerringly on the weakest spot in the paternal relation. However that may be, a period of alienation between father and son seems almost inevitable. The son has lost his young belief in the perfect wisdom and knowledge of his father; the manlier attitude of tenderness for his failings and recognition of his virtues, with love and reverence for the man he is because of both, comes but with the youth's own growth. Now he sees only the prejudices, the stiffness of his father's mind, his sternness and lack of sympathy. The father cannot perceive that his boy is grown to be a man, and a man whom he does not understand. He sees that he is alienated, and grieves that he will not profit by his experience or heed his advice; and when the son whom he has trained to tell the truth confesses that his father's God is not his God, nor his father's belief his belief, between them is a great gulf fixed. When both are Scotch, and have the courage of conviction with the temperament that looses indignation and conceals tenderness; when one is a sincere Calvinist, and to the fear that he has lost his son joins the agonized belief that his soul, more beloved than his own, is in danger of eternal death, there is bitter suffering for both. For a year this trouble clouded their home life, and Stevenson writes to Charles Baxter, in one of many letters on the subject: "If all that I hold true and most desire to spread is to be such death, and worse than death, in the eyes of my father and mother, what the devil am I to do? Here is a good heavy cross with a vengeance, and all rough with rusty nails that tear your fingers, only it is not I that have to carry it alone. I hold the light end, but the heavy burden falls on these two."

In time these differences were healed, and their love and pride in each other found expression in more than the old tenderness. Stevenson writes to an expected guest: "You must like my father because you are a human being." In Thomas Stevenson's last days, Mr. Balfour says: "The ten-

derness of the relation between father and son now became pathetic in the extreme. As the old man's powers began to fail, he would speak to Louis as though he were still a child. When they went to the theater together, and Louis stood up in his place, the father put his arm around him, saying: 'Take care, my dearie; you might fall.' At night, as he kissed his son, he would say reassuringly: 'You'll see me in the morning, dearie.' " "It was," says his daughter-in-law, "just like a mother with a young child." Before his death he suffered from profound melancholy, due to his failing health and a constitutionally gloomy view of religion. His son's letters are full of devices to cheer him—he reasons and scolds, preaches and makes fun in his efforts to lead him into a more cheerful place. He writes his mother: "I give my father up. Tell him that I give him up. I don't want no such a parent. This is not the man for my money—I do not call that by the name of religion which fills a man with bile. I write him a whole letter bidding him beware of extremes, and telling him that his gloom is gallows-worthy, and I get back an answer. Perish the thought of it!" In one of his last letters to his father: "I fear I have been a little in the dumps, which, as *you know, sir*, is a very great sin. I must try to be more cheerful, but my cough is so severe that I have sometimes most exhausting nights and very peevish wakenings. There is, my dear Mr. Stevenson, (so I moralize blandly as we sit together on the devil's garden wall), no more abominable sin than this gloom, this plaguy peevishness; why (say I), what matters it if we be a little uncomfortable? That is no *réason* for mangling our unhappy wives. And then I turn and *girn* at the unfortunate Cassandra. Your fellow-culprit, R. L. S."

From the biography and Mr. Colvin's notes we learn the details of his life; but the letters bring the man before us, in his habit as he lived, as nothing else can. Already we know the master of style, the story-teller, the poet; but here is a man who all his days fought one desperate illness after another, who must lie in bed for weeks not permitted to speak above his breath, who sought health vainly in all the quarters of the earth. Yet here is a man who wrote unceasingly till

the day he died, not pouring forth a bright stream of unstudied poetry and song; but working, revising, recasting, "in weariness and painfulness and watchings often," and making of his own books what he says all literature should be—"a green place." Many a man in his stead, an only son of parents in affluence, would have felt that he did his part in life if he but bore with patience his suffering and ill health, but Stevenson always wished to shoulder a grown man's burden. There was nothing valetudinarian about him, his bearing all his life was gallant, and some of his happiest luck came from his readiness to adventure.

When he was thirty, to put to the test his powers of self-support, that he might marry the lady of his heart, he crossed to America in the steerage, traveled in an emigrant train to California, and there struggled alone with poverty; but illness put an end to this, he came to a happy understanding with his father, married his charming wife, and went back home. During the next eight years they lived in Switzerland, in France, in England, and after his father's death again in the United States; but all that time, Stevenson, to quote himself, was "a chronic sickist, and my work cripples along between bed and the parlor, between the medicine bottle and the cupping glass. Well, I like my life all the same." In the spirit of this last line, they chartered a yacht, and, accompanied by his mother and his stepson, started for a long cruise in the South Seas. It was no holiday expedition for either his wife or himself, facing all the emergencies of his malady with no other help than Mrs. Stevenson's nursing and her "invaluable medicine chest." But they were an intrepid pair; and, though without half-measure of health between them, had enough pluck to furnish forth a ship of the line. So in 1888 they embarked, like the King of all Adventurers,

"To sail beyond the sunset and the baths
Of all the Western stars
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles."

The adventure was of the happiest fortune. Stevenson found health. "My bones were sweeter to me. I had come

home to my own climate." Here he had the joys of out-of-door life with the romance and interest and excitements that his nature had always craved, and, after some years of wandering, he bought an estate in Samoa. There, in his charming home he lived, feeling his exile and keenly missing his friends, but with the companionship of those he most loved, and with opportunity for uninterrupted work; yet full of affairs, master of a considerable estate, the head of a great household, dispensing both hospitality and justice. It was he who exposed the abominations of the existing government in Samoa. When the hurricane blew off the unripe breadfruit and the natives were reduced to famine rations, he supplied them from his own stores till the next crop. They came to him to advise, to arbitrate, always sure of his sympathy and wise counsel. These patriarchal relations satisfied the romantic as well as the kindly side of his nature, and gave him pleasure, but were no light burden. The tedious ceremonies of Samoan etiquette, with the inevitable delays of interpretation, consumed his precious time. Often when a chief and his train wound in sight he sighed with weariness, but laid down his writing and received the visit with unvexed courtesy and patience—small wonder the natives adored him! After four years of this life, warmed by the renewal of his powers, with the joy of creation undimmed, he suddenly set sail upon that more distant cruise, and touched the Happy Isles.

When Stevenson was quite a little boy he was asked what he had been doing. "I've been playing all day; at least I've been making myself cheerful." The child was father to the man, and in all the painful and weary days of his life one finds him gallantly employed in "making himself cheerful." The courage that breathes in his books informed his daily life, and Mr. Colvin tells us that under the most deplorable circumstances one always found him full of good cheer. His cheerfulness was not mere light-heartedness, but a noble achievement; though he had an inherent strain of gayety, he knew the dark places of life. "The future is always black to us Stevensons," he writes, and "I am sick of the family evil, de-

spondency." And again: "My body is most decrepit, and I can just manage to be cheery and tread down hypochondria underfoot by work." Turn through the "Letters" at will, and one sees the same record, illness, hemorrhage, prostration, the weary round of the chronic invalid. In his writing there is such insistence on the duty of cheerful courage, such a spirit of, not optimism, but blithe pessimism, of frankly facing the worst and making the best of it, that one critic, Mr. Archer, warned him that a sharp illness would shatter his philosophy, and that his gospel would not do for those "shut out from the exercise of any manly virtue save renunciation." The consequent letters to Mr. Archer are most interesting, in which Stevenson discloses that the author is not a "rosy-gilled fox-hunting squire" but an invalid, "a rickety and cloistered specter." He says in one of them: "Any brave man may make out a life which shall be happy for himself, and by so being, beneficent to those about him." With the most splendid pluck this is what he set out to do, "to keep a stiff upper lip and carry a pleasant face." He would have cheerfulness, not a matter of whim or of humors, dependent on the weather, or the vagaries of an imperfect digestion, but a duty—like telling the truth—for every day. And this stoic virtue was its own reward. It gave a breadth and sanity to his vision and saved him from the distorted view of the invalid. "To me the medicine bottle on my chimney and the blood on my handkerchief are accidents; they do not color my view of life, they do not exist in my prospect." In his letters to his friends (so often fearing the worst) he speaks much of his health, but with little comment unless of a whimsical kind, as when he announces that he and his wife are better—"but we take it by turns; it is the dog that is ill now"—and writes to Mr. Gosse: "I have that peculiar and delicious sense of being born again in an expurgated edition which belongs to convalescence." Though given to writing frankly his thoughts and feelings on other subjects, it is rarely that he speaks of this, and then discloses the faith that lies at the root of his cheerfulness. "I have so many things to make life sweet to me, it seems a pity I cannot have that other one

thing, health. But though you will be angry to hear it, I believe, for myself at least, what is best. I believed it all through my worst days, and I am not ashamed to profess it now."

His illness did not set him aside; he was a worker in the thick of life, with scores of friends and constant new interests; with his sympathy and versatility, his gayety, his brilliant fancy he gave great happiness to others, and so attained it for himself. "Sick and well, I've had a splendid life of it." He had what he finds to be Mr. Pepys's most striking attribute, an ardent enjoyment—"I was never bored in my life." His interest was perennially fresh, and he was ready to be delighted on the slightest pretext. "If the weather would but turn, I should be observed to walk in hornpipes." When Mr. Gosse sends money from a publisher he writes, "It was a heavenly thing;" and declares, "The forty pounds, or as I prefer to put it, the one thousand francs has been such a piercing sun ray as my whole gray life is gilt withal." He thinks one hundred pounds for "Treasure Island" "a sight more than it's worth," and writes this charming boyish letter to his father and mother: "My dearest people, I have had a great piece of news. There has been offered for 'Treasure Island,' how much do you suppose? I believe it would be an excellent jest to keep the answer till my next letter. For two cents I would do so. Shall I? Any way, I'll turn the page first. No—well—a hundred pounds all alive O! A hundred jingling, tingling, golden minted quid. Is not this wonderful?" He signs himself, "Your loving and ecstatic son Treasures Eilaan." To another correspondent at the same time: "I am going to make a fortune. I shall begin with a half penny, and it shall end with horses and yachts and all the fun of the fair. This is the first gray hair in my character; rapacity has begun to show." Stevenson on the instant must have remembered Byron, insisting on his guineas, and saying that "avarice is an old-gentlemanly vice."

His letters are alive with gayety and high spirits (although he says, "I am never funny"), and it is impossible to convey by quotation or by the heaping up of epithet the whimsical

humor, the audacity, the boyish glee of his frolic moods. The letters of a lifetime—in every key—show the man as he showed himself, consciously and involuntarily to his friends. They are full of charm, that indefinable quality which is not wit nor fine writing nor humor nor noble sentiment, but the reflection of that elusive personal quality which bewilders while it endears. One understands why his friends not only loved him but delighted in him. Never was there a creature so gifted—full of manly virtues, with the wisdom born of suffering, yet intensely alive, with a boyish, tricky spirit, and a Heaven-sent delight in little things that had in it a touch both of the child and the poet. In Samoa, when mediating in behalf of the natives, he was often detained till a late hour; and he always wished to see in his house the welcoming gleam of many lighted windows, as, riding through the dark forest, he drew near home. His only objection to that same house was that “it is not really strategically defensible.” The same brilliant fancy and love of romance that filled his childhood’s sick room with knights and battles, with quests and perils and adventures animated his mature years; and when ostensibly engaged on some dull task, his imagination was transforming it into something delightful. “If he was holding an inquiry into the theft of a pig, he conducted himself as if he were the Lord President in the Inner House.” One smiles, but with sympathy—how lovable must this man have been!

He had the intense self-consciousness and introspective habit of the artist temperament. He analyzed his own acts and motives with keen insight, and talked to his friends of the results of his research with engaging candor. These little confidences give one a sense of knowing the man and understanding him. When one reads, “I use the term of reproach, not because I am angry with you, but because I am angry with myself and desire to give pain,” it is like looking into eyes that instant flash comprehension. Who does not know the feeling with which, after a long calculation of ways and means, he exclaims: “Ah, Colvin, you don’t know how much good I have done myself. I feared to think this

all out by myself." Now and then there is a naïve touch, as "I am a rogue at egotism myself. When I see a man who does not think pretty well of himself, I always suspect him of being in the right. And besides, if he does not like himself, whom he has seen, how is he ever to like one whom he never can see but in dim and artificial presentments?"

Most entertaining are his comments on his own work and that of his correspondents. He writes Mr. Gosse, with the most delightful praise of his book; then warns him, "But beware of purple passages. I wonder if you think as well of your purple passages as I do of mine? I wonder if you think as ill of mine as I do of yours? I wonder." Concerning a recent book of poems he writes: "You know what a wooden-hearted curmudgeon I am about contemporary verse; I like none of it except some of my own." In another letter he speaks of his poetry: "A kind of prose Herrick divested of the gift of verse, and you behold the Bard. But I like it." He had the honest workman's hatred of all undue or ill-considered praise. He writes to Le Gallienne: "I do not know that I am sensitive to criticism if it be hostile; I am sensitive, indeed, where it is friendly; and when I read such criticism as yours, I am emboldened to go on and praise God."

Stevenson had a genius for friendship, whose touchstone is frankness; and no man was ever more blessed with friends than he. The honorable list came, in time, to include the name of nearly every contemporary who had won success or whose writing held promise of it. Their letters are full of discussions of their work, written in the frankest spirit, praise and blame meted with an equal hand. Sometimes the author protests, as when Stevenson mildly inquires: "Frankly, Colvin, do you think it a good plan to be so eminently descriptive and even eloquent in dispraise? You rolled such a lot of polysyllables over me that a better man than I might have been disheartened." This was when he was trying in San Francisco to support himself by his pen, an experiment of which his friends were unanimous in disapproval, as he complains: "Not one soul of you ever gives me any news of people or things. Everybody writes me sermons. It is

good for me, but hardly the food necessary for a man who lives all alone on forty-five cents a day. If one of you could write me a letter with a jest in it, a letter like what is written to real people in this world—I am still flesh and blood—I should enjoy it.” Mr. Henley’s criticism of “Our Lady of the Snows” elicited this “reproof valiant:” “Heavens! have I done the like? ‘Clarify and strain,’ indeed? ‘Make it like Marvell,’ no less. I’ll tell you what—you may go to the devil; that’s what I think. ‘Be eloquent’ is another of your pregnant suggestions. I cannot sufficiently thank you for that one. Portrait of a person about to be eloquent at the request of a literary friend. You seem to forget, sir, that rhyme is rhyme, sir, and—go to the devil. I’ll try to improve it, but I shan’t be able to—O go to the devil. Seriously, you’re a cool hand. And then you have the brass to ask me *why* ‘my steps went one by one?’ Why? Powers of man! to rhyme with *sun*, to be sure. Why else could it be? And you yourself have been a poet! G-r-r-r-r! I’ll never be a poet any more. Men are so d—d ungrateful and captious, I declare I could weep.” Having thus reproached him in prose, he reproaches him in impromptu verse, and concludes by saying: “Your suggestions have broken the heart of the scald.”

The intercourse between Stevenson and this friend seems to have been characterized by unusual freedom of speech. Mr. Henley wields a trenchant pen, and it is possible that in his unfortunate and somewhat ill-tempered strictures on his friend he wrote only what he had often said to Stevenson himself, forgetting that the flexibility of the spoken word is denied to the written; and that while one may censure a friend’s foibles to him without offense, when those faults are “set in a notebook, learned and conned by rote to cast into”—a public print, at so much a column, it becomes a serious breach of good faith. It is hard for those who loved Stevenson to forgive him.

Stevenson insisted that he learned to write laboriously, as a man learns a trade, and that he had done more with small gifts than any man of his day. To common mortals

it seems that all the good fairies had been at his christening; certainly he had one priceless gift—the power to win love. Never was man more beloved; not only by friends with their adoption tried, but by servants and tradesmen and seafaring folk, people of every rank and occupation or of none at all, of divers colors and as many shades of morals. Especially was it true of those who served him, from the days when Alison Cunningham “refused an offer of marriage in order to be near her laddie,” till his Samoan body servant folded his hands in the attitude of prayer. We see Valentine Roch, the French maidservant, follow his fortunes to England, America, and the South Seas. The Chinese cook (that least sentimental of human beings) weeps for joy when the master of the house returns from a long absence. When he was ill at Bournemouth, he made friends with the barber who shaved him, with the picture frame maker, with the vet. who doctored his dog; and sooner or later they all told him the story of their lives. When he is trying to charter a schooner for his cruise in the South Seas, the owner does not wish to negotiate with an author, conceiving the creature to be inevitably a “crank;” but, after seeing Stevenson, he puts the matter through willingly, finding him to be a “plain, sensible man.” The captain of the ship had small relish for the undertaking, and showed open dislike and contempt for a fresh-water seaman when they left port. Before the cruise was half done they were good friends, and one finds Stevenson ordering a complete set of his books as a gift for Captain Otis.

He was all things to all men; and this without guile or insincerity, for his nature was many-sided and his genuine interests innumerable. He knew instinctively where lay the interest of others, whose habits of thought and life were widely separate from his own, and adapted himself to them without a suspicion of condescension. His unfailing tact in this particular is instanced in his letters to his nurse. When he was in the islands, he gained the love and confidence of the natives as no other white man did. They told him their folklore, recalled the old tales, ancient customs, and traditions to

please him. One chieftain received him into blood-brotherhood, exchanged names with him, Samoan fashion, and conceived for him a beautiful affection. After Stevenson's departure Ori-a-Ori wrote to him voicing his love and sorrow. His expressions are as old as grief, and as familiar, but there is in them a heart-moving pathos. "My nineteenth century strikes here and lies alongside of something beautiful and ancient. . . . I would rather have received such a letter than written 'Red-gauntlet' or the Sixth *Æneid*." It is in such expressions of appreciation that one divines the secret of his love-compelling nature. He never took affection as a matter of course; he gave as he received, and I think it may be truly said of him that he "loved much."

He says in a letter, "It is kindness alone that makes life tolerable," and it was his creed to practice it. One sees him as a young man tramping at night over the city with a lost child on his shoulder, consoling him with a woman's tenderness; when on that frightful emigrant train he forgets his own misery to minister to a sick baby. He writes from a California goat ranch that he had been too ill to write to New York for his letters, then mentions casually that he is teaching the children of the house to read. There is a little letter wholly taken up with his landlord's dying child; he does not say, however, that he himself is ill from having nursed it. It is not probable that these were interesting or congenial folk, but he could not be near people without entering into their joys and sorrows. He was interested in them, and so got love and interest in return. In consequence he found charming folk everywhere, even in a little California village in '79. He writes from Monterey of his evenings with the restaurateur, and the editor (who had no brain music, but was a good fellow), and François, the baker, with real pleasure. Then comes the characteristic addition: "Choose in your head the best volume of Labiche there is, to be sent at once to my restaurant man, a most pleasant old boy with whom I play chess daily and discuss the universe. He has been out of France thirty years, and never heard of Labiche."

He missed no opportunity of giving pleasure or of offering

aid, if it were needed, with a delicacy and sympathy above all praise. After his death, an Australian journalist wrote to the *Times*: "Some years ago I lay ill in San Francisco, an obscure journalist, quite friendless. Stevenson, who knew me slightly, came to my bedside and said: 'I suppose you are like all of us, you don't keep your money. Now, if a little loan, as between one man of letters and another—eh?' This to a lad, writing rubbish for a vulgar sheet in California." Mr. Balfour tells of the stranger who came unbidden to Stevenson's funeral, and explained as the tears ran down his face that he could not keep away. Sometime before, Stevenson had met him, a stranger in the way, had entered into talk and had drawn from him the story of his trouble and his necessities. "He gave me twenty dollars and some good advice and encouragement. I took heart again, and I'm getting on all right now; but if I hadn't met Mr. Stevenson, and he hadn't helped me, I should have killed myself that day." One act of his met a beautiful reward. He was unwearied in help to the natives when the heads of the rebellion were in prison in Apia, and spent money and time and influence in alleviating their misfortunes. When they were released, in sign of their gratitude the chiefs had built at their own charges a roadway to his house—a considerable undertaking amid that tropical vegetation. They called it "The Road of the Loving Heart," nor could they have chosen more fitting appellation—it was the path he had walked all his life. As said the old Samoan chieftain, "The day is no longer than his kindness." MARIE LOUISE WHITING.